

## **CONGRESSIONAL PROGRESSIVE CAUCUS PEACE AND SECURITY TASK FORCE**

### **BRIEFING ON AFGHANISTAN:**

#### **“A COUNTDOWN TO JULY REDEPLOYMENT”**

**MARCH 15, 2011**

**[as prepared for delivery]**

Today, March 15, 2011, we will spend roughly \$325 million fighting in Afghanistan, \$20 million of which was spent during the time the Congressional Progressive Caucus's Peace and Security Taskforce hosted this panel. In this month, we will have spent over \$10 billion in Afghanistan. In this year, we will spend \$120 billion fighting the war in Afghanistan.

And for what? In the last year, we witnessed the greatest number of US casualties, the greatest single-year spike in insurgent attacks, the most devastating of Afghan civilian deaths (an air strike on nine kids gathering wood), an Afghan majority that says their basic security and basic services have worsened substantially, and majority populations in America and Afghanistan that want the troops to leave.

Ten years into this war, and what do we have to show it? Every two or three years, the Pentagon comes up with a new strategy to justify another round of funding and forces. Their latest strategy arms local villagers with cash and weapons. We call it the “Afghan Local Police” but it's nothing more than a US commander handing out guns and cash at their discretion. We're rolling this out nationally with potentially disastrous consequences, pitting tribe against tribe and filling the coffers of some former, existing and future warlords with more ways to fight each other and us. It is a recipe for disaster, not a strategy for success.

It is a surprise, then, that psychological operations were used on US Senators during their CODEL to Afghanistan – as exposed by one of our panelists today? Was the Pentagon's war strategy was so ineffectual that a propaganda war was required to paper it over?

The Defense Department will counter by saying that we are finally finding the right strategy, we finally have the right General in charge and we finally have more troops on the ground. General Petraeus will suggest that now is the critical moment wherein we can tip the balance in our favor, that we are winning the locals hearts and minds, and that we need time to give the latest strategy a chance to work. Others in Washington will chime with commitments to keep troops in Afghanistan long after 2014 and my Republican colleagues on the Senate side will proffer plans for permanent bases.

Amidst this absolute ambiguity of goals and objectives, there is remarkably little oversight and evaluation of war strategy and war spending that justifies any of this. This is particularly appalling at a time when the Republicans are cutting every possibly dollar of domestic spending and killing critical education, healthcare and workforce programs that cost pennies compared to the billions wasted in Afghanistan. The double standard is utterly indefensible.

The way forward, for those who are serious about tackling security threats to this country – by

actors who are increasingly agile, mobile, and amorphous – must include some reflection of best practices (what's working, what's not) and some recognition of limited financial and human resources.

In doing so, we will come to realize that a heavy military, air and navy footprint is ineffective in dealing with guerilla-like warfare and financially unsustainable if we want address threats in more than two countries – which is likely, given the unrest in North Africa and the Middle East.

We will come to realize, as the Rand Corporation has already pointed out, that policing, intelligence and negotiations (all of which are critically underfunded and underdeveloped in Afghanistan) is what works best in undermining and dismantling threats of this nature – a move likely discouraged by the defense industry which prefers big-ticket military equipment like the Joint Strike Fighter.

We will come to realize that in order to protect vulnerable populations from further instability we must address their basic human needs. The fact that Iraqis are protesting the lack of basic services, corrupt political leadership, and non-inclusive government, shows how little priority we gave to this in the last eight years. We leave Iraq not much better than we found it, after spending hundreds of billions of dollars on an ill-begotten war and an ill-guided strategy.

We are making the same mistake in Afghanistan, at a price tag that makes Republican CR cuts pale in comparison. When will we learn? After we've completely broken the bank, spent trillions of deficit-funded dollars, and drilled deeper into debt?

If Republicans care about the fiscal sustainability and economic security of our country, then these wars must not be protected from their pernicious purview, because these wars are making us less secure, not more.

Admiral Mike Mullen was right: the biggest threat to our national security is our debt. Now if the Pentagon would just be willing to do something about that threat, we might actually see a different defense strategy abroad and a different defense budget here at home.